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AUTHOR Lang, Susan; Teifel, Phyllis
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ABSTRACT

Operation Success is an innovative approach to dealing with potential dropout/high-risk students. The program operates out of the Center for Arts and Technology-Pickering Campus in Northern Chester County, Pennsylvania. The campus offers the students a full-day program, half academic, half vocational. The building of self-esteem and self-confidence is the key component and is stressed in all activities. Operation Success deals with academically disadvantaged youth as defined by the Carl D. Perkins Act. Students must have average or above ability and attend the program voluntarily. Students are scheduled from one to five periods each week in the Operation Success room. A close monitoring system consists of the vocational teacher, the academic teacher, and the Operation Success staff. Tests are used to assess student needs when they enter the program, and very detailed records are kept of each student. Students work in small groups with no higher than 4:1 ratio to the two staff members. Computers are used in both academic and vocational areas. One-to-one counseling is given when indicated. Home visits are made as necessary, and phone contact with parents is made on a regular basis. Operation Success deals with about 75-80 students per year on an open-entry, open-exit basis. Operation Success has about a 94 percent success rate--students remaining in school and successfully advancing to the next grade. Most students graduate and become employed. (KC)

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Center for Arts & Technology

Pickering Campus

OPERATION SUCCESS

*Susan Lang, Co-ordinator
Phyllis Teifel, Teacher*

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OPERATION SUCCESS

It is happening all over the United States - young teenagers are dropping out at an alarming rate. Thirty percent of high school students drop out before they graduate.

For all their geographic, economic, and social differences, there are a number of common reasons why students drop out. Lack of self-esteem, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse are high on the list and greatly affect the population that we, in Operation Success, touch.

The cost of illiteracy in today's society is both frightening and staggering...Adolescence is a time for choices and inspection, but the academically disadvantaged adolescent rarely sees anything of value in himself, and this influences his choices in negative ways.

Operation Success is an innovative approach to dealing with these potential drop-out/high-risk students. The program operates out of the Center for Arts & Technology - Pickering Campus which serves a large geographic area in Northern Chester County. The Pickering Campus is unique in as much as it offers the student a full day program, half in academics, half vocational in nature. Students Utilizing Correct Courses Experience Self Satisfaction (Success) is what the program is all about. The building of self esteem and self confidence is the key component and is stressed in all activities. Operation Success functions with school board budgeting and funds from the state under the Carl Perkins Act.

Operation Success deals with academically disadvantaged youth as spelled out under the Perkins Guidelines. They lack motivation, have high absenteeism, function three years or more under expected grade level, and have personal and family problems. Candidates for Operation Success must have average or above ability and can not be labeled as Special Education i.e. Socially Emotionally Disturbed (S.E.D.) or Learning Disabled (L.D.). Operation Success is strictly a voluntary program to which the students must willingly agree to attend.

Candidates are referred to the program by staff members which include guidance counselors, academic and vocational teachers, nurses and administration. Referrals have also been made by outside agencies such as Visiting Nurses Associations (VNA) and Teen Parenting Program. Self and friend referral by the students has dramatically increased this year signifying student acceptance of the program. Once a referral is made, the students' record is carefully read. If it appears that Operation Success may be helpful to the student, an interview is arranged. The program is carefully explained and the student, if willing, is scheduled from one to five periods per week in the Operation Success room.

The student is never removed from an academic class, but is scheduled from a study hall as first choice, and then from a shop period if necessary. At this point, the student's vocational teacher is notified of their participation in the program and a schedule is set up with their approval.

A very close monitoring system is arranged between the vocational teacher, the academic teacher and the Operation Success staff. Any deficiencies in math or reading that may affect the student in his technical area are noted and an individualized program begins. Upon entering Operation Success, the staff administers several tests to more adequately assess the student's current functioning level. The WRAT, (Wide Range Achievement Test) and the Gates McGinitie are employed. The Gates was selected as it gives the staff a very good picture of the student's reading level; showing both sight word ability and the comprehension level which is usually appreciably lower. Then the COPS System is administered. Here we are able to look at three things; interest, values, and abilities. Very few students that we deal with have clear realistic goals. This COPS testing renders results which can aid both the staff and the student in dealing with goal deficiencies. Once the student can relate interest, values, and abilities to real life vocational goals, motivation usually improves.

A very detailed record is kept of each student including, test results, notated comments on each meeting with the student, and an Individualized Vocational Plan (I.V.P.)

The staff of Operation Success consists of two full time employees. Phyllis Teifel, a certified learning facilitator and teacher, and Susan Lang, a certified teacher and counselor.

The students work in small groups with no higher than a 4:1 ratio, students to teacher. Their work is highly individualized based on their needs and ascertained deficiencies. The physical work space invites an informal feeling. It is a large room in which the desks are arranged in small groupings. Several long tables are also employed. There are two sound proof rooms off this large area. One is the counselor's office and one is a quiet room for the students. Operation Success uses three Apple computers with printers and an IBM PC for data storage. The software utilized is chosen to enhance and solidify learning which is occurring in both academic and vocational areas. Material on stress, self concept, and self esteem is also used.

In many cases, when counseling is indicated, the student is seen on a one to one basis with the counselor. The W.I.T. (Whatever It Takes) philosophy operates within this program. Referrals are made to Community Resources when required i.e. Community Counseling, Planned Parenthood, Teen Parenting. The family becomes involved as the student's problems do not exist within a vacuum. Home visits are employed as necessary, and phone contact with parents occurs on a regular basis. The students realize this relationship exists and are usually much more open within this type of structure.

Students use Operation Success in a myriad of ways. For some it is the extra help required in vocational Math and English. For some, it is a time out room, while for still others, it is a very personal counseling time.

Students have responded to this very special form of caring. The essential importance of self esteem is continually stressed. Once success is encountered, many students spiral on to positions in other areas as well, i.e. relationships and jobs. Progress reports are sent to both vocational and academic teachers so that the Operation Success staff can see what is transpiring in all areas of the students' school experience.

Presently Operation Success deals with 75 students. It is an open entry/open exit program. Last school year we dealt with 80 students and will surpass that in the 89-90 school year.

In order to validate Operation Success, statistics are necessary. While statistics are indicators, they do not reveal the personal aspect of success. Statistics do not show the look of self confidence and pride on a teenager's face when he/she receives their 1st passing mark on a project. Statistics do not indicate the boost a student, who has spent most of their school life as the "dummy" gets when he/she demonstrates the ability to achieve "honors" in grades. Statistics also do not begin to compare with the look of joy on the face of a parent who sees new hope for their child who has a history of unhappy and often painful school experiences. Success is what makes it work, but since statistics are necessary, we can say Operation Success had a 93% success rate for the 1987-88 school year and a 94% success rate for the 1988-89 school year. Success being defined here as a student remaining in school and successfully advancing to the next grade level. Last year all but 2 seniors graduated and these graduates are now gainfully employed. Of the 7 students who left school last year one has re-enrolled and one has successfully completed his GED. We currently have many seniors out on Co-op work Program and plan for over 60% of this class to be out by January. Operation Success works closely with the directors of Co-op to reward students who qualify.

Operation Success is not a miracle cure. It is an innovative and caring program for students at risk. It represents a safe, nurturing, caring environment for many students who have never belonged anywhere. It requires a certain amount of "buy in" for the students and for those who are willing to do so, it represents success. Since the beginning of the 1989-90 school year, Operation Success has added over 4% to the school population. Students have been referred by counselors, have seen the program and have opted to change schools in order to be part of Operation Success. The program allows them to experience success and to increase their self esteem as their confidence and ability grow.

Paying for a program such as ours is always an issue, but the cost on the preventive level is only a fraction of a percent of what it will cost to maintain an adult on welfare. Pay now or pay much more later are the only alternatives available. The problem of high risk students must be given high priority and must be addressed immediately.

Operation Success does work both on a statistical and on a personal level. Students achieving are students succeeding, and that's what our program is all about - Success!!